Prez Primary Ballot Order Set Through Luck Of Draw

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By Sam Doran

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, JAN. 2, 2024.....The names of Democrat Congressman Dean Phillips, Republican former Gov. Chris Christie, and Libertarian lawyer Jacob Hornberger will appear at the top of their parties' presidential primary ballots in Massachusetts on March 5.

To organize the names of three Democrats, seven Republicans, and five Libertarians in the order they will appear on ballots, the candidate names were sealed in blank envelopes, and Secretary William Galvin spun them around in a golden tombola in the State Library, and then picked the envelopes out one at a time.

Who makes the cut to get their name thrown into the metal drum is initially determined by the state parties, but the state secretary has an opportunity to add names independently.

The Massachusetts Democratic Party forwarded just one name to Galvin's office -- President Joseph Biden's. The secretary added Phillips and author Marianne Williamson into the mix. The Brighton Democrat "determined that they are nationally recognized candidates," his office said on New Year's Day, "[i]n accordance with state law."

Describing the criteria by which he can add names that have been "left out" by the parties, Galvin cited Williamson's prior campaign for president in 2020, when the state party included her name on the list for the ballot.

"She has been persistent and consistent in her activities throughout the country. We don't make this decision based on who's going to win, or who might win. Is this a person who's trying to be a national candidate? And I felt, based on the criteria that she's on already in a number of states, placed on the ballot here last time by the Democratic state party, it was appropriate to include her again," Galvin said.

As for Phillips, a Minnesota Congressman who announced his campaign last fall, Galvin called him "nationally recognized," and pointed to "significant" campaign spending levels and "extensive reportage on his positions" in national media outlets.

Galvin left the state Republican Party's list of choices as-is, including the name of former President Donald Trump, whose inclusion on primary ballots has been challenged in other states.

"I think there's been a lot of confusion between the ballot access issue and the issue of eligibility. The real issue presented by the 14th Amendment is eligibility to be president," Galvin told

reporters after the name-drawing ceremony, adding that he hoped to see a "decisive decision" from the U.S. Supreme Court on Trump's eligibility.

The secretary said his office has heard from "a number of Democratic activists" recently on the topic, and he recalled telling some of them that Trump could still win the state Republican primary as a write-in candidate even if his name were not printed on ballots.

"I said, what do you suggest I should do if people write him in? Well, they said, don't count him. I said, are you serious? ... Elections and primaries are about voters. They're not about candidates, they're not about offices, they're about voters. It's the opportunity to make a decision the voters have. We're not going to deprive voters of the right to cast a ballot. A lot of people have said this is about defending democracy. And as a citizen, I might agree with that. But I think the best way to defend democracy is to participate in democracy. And that opportunity's here for everyone in Massachusetts," Galvin said.

The Reconstruction-era Constitutional amendment includes a prohibition on certain previous officeholders who "have engaged in insurrection" subsequently holding "any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State."

Bay Staters must be registered to vote by Feb. 24 to participate in a March 5 presidential primary. This election's vote-by-mail application deadline is Feb. 27. An early voting period will open Saturday, Feb. 24, and run through Friday, March 1.

Here are the three party ballots for Super Tuesday in Massachusetts, in the order the names emerged from the spinning tombola:

Democratic Party

- Dean Phillips
- Joseph Biden
- Marianne Williamson

Republican Party

- Chris Christie
- Ryan Binkley
- Vivek Ramaswamy
- Asa Hutchinson
- Donald Trump
- Ron DeSantis
- Nikki Haley

Libertarian Party

- Jacob Hornberger
- Michael Rectenwald
- Chase Oliver
- Michael Ter Maat
- Lars Damian Mapstead

"This is obviously a very important election. We've had record turnouts in the last two presidential elections here in Massachusetts. I certainly expect that that will be the case again," Galvin said.

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01/02/2024